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THE MINISTRY OF
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MINISTRY OF SILENCE
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MEDITATION

Adapted from "Creative Prayer"

By
E. HERMAN



PUBLISHING HOUSE M. E. CHURCH
SOUTH

NASHVILLE, TENN. DALLAS, TEXAS
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with God. As the little child learns its first prayers from its mother's lips, the soul learns to pray from God. There is not a half-formed aspiration or a heavenward impulse that was not first "inspoken" into the heart by the Spirit who maketh intercession for us. We could not pray aright unless the Lord of Prayer taught us, and the only prayers that remain unanswered are the prayers which He does not inspire. But we so often refuse to come to prayer through the antechamber of silence. We will not wait and listen for the prayers He is waiting to pray in and through us. And the result is a long, weary, discouraging monologue, which grows intolerable as we become aware of our aloneness. None except the vividly imaginative, who delight in weaving romances around themselves, can sustain the monologue indefinitely; after a time, the heart grows sick with hope deferred, and we abandon prayer as a dreary form of self-soliloquy—like a make-believe of talking through a telephone with no one listening at the other end.

Yet, did we but know it, a recourse to attentive silence would make even these self-willed prayers alive with the reality of the Divine response. The Spirit whom we disregarded in the framing of our prayers is waiting to guide them still, clarifying our vision, deepening our insight, taking of the hidden treasure of Christ and showing it to our holden eyes. When prayer seems a hallucination, the simple expedient of hushing the soul to silence often serves to assure us, past all doubting, of the reality of our contact with the Unseen. It is upon our willingness to listen and hear God speak that our prayer-life from first to last depends. This should be clear when we remember that prayer is the soul's pilgrimage from self to God; and the

most effectual remedy for self-love and self-absorption is the habit of humble listening.

I

Thoughtful men everywhere are awake to the therapeutic and recreative force of silence. It is the wisdom of the wanderer who, wearied and sore at heart, comes home at dusk, and is stabbed by his sense of strangeness amid the familiar surroundings of his own country. In a passage of luminous quality, "A. E." (Mr. George Russell) has voiced this wisdom. It records the mood of one who, after a year's sojourn in the sordid city, comes back to the green land he loves:

I felt like a child who wickedly stays from home through a long day, and who returns frightened and penitent at nightfall wondering whether it will be received with forgiveness by its mother. Would the Mother of us all receive me again as one of her children? Would the winds with wandering voices be as before the evangelists of her love? . . . I knew if benediction came how it would come. I would sit among the rocks with shut eyes, waiting humbly as one waits in the antechambers of the mighty, and if the invisible ones chose me as companion they would begin with a soft breathing of their intimacies creeping on me with shadowy affection like children who steal nigh to the bowed head and suddenly whisper fondness on the ear before it has even heard a footfall. So I stole out of the cottage and over the dark ridges to the place of rocks, and sat down and let the coolness of the night chill and still the fiery dust in the brain. I waited trembling for the faintest touch, the shyest breathings of the Everlasting within my soul, the sign of reception and forgiveness. I knew it would come.*

We of to-day have lost the sure-footed certainty which our spiritual fathers had. We do not claim to have attained; we cannot even be said to press towards the mark, for the mark is often hidden from our dull and wavering

*The Candle of Vision, PP. 1-2.

eyes. But even though the goal looms dim in the mist and we are not quite certain of the way, we stand wistfully waiting for someone or something to set us on the path.

We wait, but lack the wisdom of them that wait. We wait impatiently, feverishly turning the pages of a hundred guide-books, making voluble enquiries of this expert and that, embarking upon any and every adventure that tempts our vagrant fancy. We are even violent at times, but with all our violence we do not take the Kingdom by force.

Then, exhausted with our profitless gropings and flutterings, we listen, perchance, to a stray prophet who reminds us that there is such a thing as a divine science of waiting, and that its master-key is silence—the deep, full stillness of the expectant soul. “Be still, and know that I am God.”

But we hesitate. We know that silence is indeed an unexplored realm, peopled with disquieting apparitions and brimful of unguessed terrors for the chance traveller. No one who has honestly tried to still his soul—to wean intellect and will and emotion from their external activity to a concurrent attitude of quiet expectancy—but has sensed possibilities of weird experiences compared to which the most “successful” spiritualistic séance would appear trite and tame.

For we too have sojourned too long in the dusty city of external relationships. We have gazed so fixedly and persistently upon the pageantry of passing things that they have become our only reality. We have lived so deeply in the lives of our neighbors and our community—and in the mere shell of their lives at that—that we have lost track of that mysterious “buried life” of ours which is

the only real life we possess. Our very religion has become little more than a vigorous effort to be sociable and communicative. Impulses which should breed resolution in our souls are exhausted in resolutions on paper, and thoughts that should condense to strong purpose evaporate in a moist vapor of small talk. And, as a result, silence of any kind has become difficult. The moment the noise about us stops, we become disquieted and ill at ease. Accustomed to commune with anyone and everyone, we have lost the art of communing with our own spirits, and the prospect of such self-communing does not inspire us with confidence.

And yet a deep instinctive wisdom—part of our inheritance from an age when men dwelt alone and walked with God—tells us that in quietness lies our salvation. It has been well said that in the darkness the eyes are opened, and in silence the heart speaks. He, too, was a wise man who first discovered that in order to live we must stand aloof from what the crowd calls living; and so was that other unknown scribe who told us that “silent men are kings, for they rule over a great country where none can follow them.” And if the stillness of self-communing is a veritable well of life and healing, what of that “silence of the soul that waits for more than man to teach”? Yes, we know ourselves to have been in the far country, and, having returned to our own land, our only wisdom is to close our eyes and wait humbly, “as one waits in the antechamber of the mighty,” for the reconciling touch of God.

For, say what we will—and the conviction will not be accepted unchallenged by the mind of to-day—a discipline of solitude and silence is essential for those who would

acquaint themselves with God and be at peace. We are living in an age which has discovered the meaning and value of corporateness. Fellowship is its watchword, and community of experience its aim. And the eye of the age has seen truly, for until the individual knows himself as a member of corporate humanity, his personal experience must remain fragmentary and barren. We are in sober truth members one of another, and it is only in fellowship that we can realize God's purpose.

But where we are continually led astray is in confounding vital corporateness either with mere gregariousness, or with sociability and communicativeness, or with outward uniformity of opinion and action. All these may exist apart from any vital fellowship. They are, in fact, not essential to fellowship at all, and often constitute its most stubborn hindrance. The solitary worshiper who really touches God, and touches Him not with a merely self-regarding motive, but with a heart of love for all men and a tender fellow-feeling with human need and woe, is engaged in a more genuine act of fellowship than a thousand gregarious individuals who mistake external togetherness for vital unity. Such a man is worshiping with the whole Church Catholic, and, like his Lord, seeks to sanctify himself for his brethren's sake. We need not decry togetherness; it is a necessity for the normal human being, and experiences are possible to a company of men of one heart and mind which are not possible for even the noblest and saintliest individual alone. But we constantly tend to take it for granted that mere togetherness is equivalent to true unity, and that the man who feels within himself the Divine call to solitude and silence is thereby cutting

himself off from the fellowship. Such an assumption is entirely contrary to fact.

If we read the biographies of the great and wise, be they statesmen or priests, teachers or poets, Roman Catholics or Quakers, we shall find that they were men of long silences and deep ponderings. Whatever of vision, of power, of genius there was in their work was wrought in silence. And when we turn to the inner circle of the spiritual masters—the men and women, not necessarily gifted or distinguished, to whom God was “a living, bright reality” which supernaturalized their everyday life and transmuted their homeliest actions into sublime worship—we find that their roots struck deep into the soil of spiritual silence. Living in the world and rejoicing in sweet human relationships, they yet kept a little cell in their hearts whither they might run to be alone with God.]

II

We know that this is so. We too have tried to practice this pregnant silence, but the results have been disappointing. Whether we sought help from such corporate movements as The Fellowship of Silence, or tried to hush our souls in solitude, we have found it a difficult and futile experiment. To begin with, we were torn asunder by a thousand and one distractions. Scarcely had we resolved to be silent, when a swarm of intruding thoughts, many of them absurdly irrelevant, laid siege to our souls. Trifles that had not caused us a moment's reflection before, suddenly assumed a morbid importance. Considerations we would have brushed aside under any other circumstances, presented themselves again and again with grotesque insistence and we were helpless against them. Business problems and family cares pressed upon us with a weight they never had previously. Then we became

acutely conscious of our bodies, which rebelled against the unwonted stillness. Every nerve grew super-acutely sensitive. The ticking of the clock, the crackling of a log in the grate, the slightest sound or movement became a small torture to the sensitive, and tried the temper of the more robust.

And when at last we gained the upper hand of these distractions, one of two things happened. Either our silence degenerated into idle day-dreaming, or the enervating mist of undifferentiated feeling, or merely a dull emptiness that left one yawning. Or else it sharpened into a state of futile expectancy. It became dense, strained, uncanny. The tension was that of painful listening, as of one who strains his ear for the sound of a footfall which he knows in his heart will never come. And it all ended in a loss of vitality. One's tone was lowered. After all this expenditure of vital force, one was left with nothing more substantial than the weakness of reaction from a purely artificial strain. It was as if a man had clenched his fist and driven it, with all the weight of his muscle, into the empty air.

We have looked for the cause of our failure to achieve the dynamic silence of the saints in every direction but the right one. We have studied various methods and directions, turned in our despair to the fanaticisms of Madame Guyon and her type, and wasted time and energy in trying to force ourselves into a mood as artificial as it was evanescent. Finally we persuaded ourselves that "times have changed." The brooding silence of the saints in which so many great things were born seems incompatible with a twentieth-century background. They lived in days of spiritual leisure, when problems were few and

simple, and a dormant social conscience allowed them to concentrate upon the business of "making their souls." In our day things are different, and unselfish activity must be to us what the Prayer of Quiet was to St. Teresa.

But the truth lies elsewhere. The one fact we forget is that the saints were capable of spiritual silence simply because they had not contracted our modern habit of ceaseless talk in their ordinary life. Their days were days of silence, relieved by periods of conversation, while ours are a wilderness of talk with a rare oasis of silence.

It is useless to imagine that one can pass at a bound from a daily round in which the lust of talk absorbs three-fourths of the soul's energy to a state of harmonious, revealing stillness. The practice of silence must begin, not in the "quiet hour," or in the fellowship-meeting, but in the office and the home, the playing-field and the church. The soul whose virility has been allowed to ooze out through the tongue during eleven hours of the day, need not hope to regain it during the silent twelfth hour. To put it bluntly, the first step towards attaining interior quiet is to hold one's peace more frequently and to better purpose in the ordinary ways of life. "Silence," said Thomas Carlyle, "is the element in which great things fashion themselves together, that at length they may emerge full-formed and majestic into the daylight of life which they are henceforth to rule. Do thou thyself but hold thy tongue for one day, and on the morrow how much clearer are thy purpose and duties; what wreck and rubbish have the mute workmen within thee swept away when intrusive noises were shut out!"

The contempt of healthy practical minds for the artificial cult of silence as found in New Thought and other

quasi-esoteric circles is not entirely just. With all their vagaries and affectations, these schools of silence and concentration aim at supplying a very genuine lack. They seek to provide artificial short cuts to a state of poise and harmony which ought to have been attained by means of a natural, progressive discipline dating from early childhood. We have yet to accept and act upon the axiom that the cultivation of a habit of silence is an integral part of all true education; and that children, so far from looking upon a demand for silence as an unnatural and intolerable imposition, have an inborn aptitude for quietness.

To realize the truth of this, one need only witness the silent time in a Montessori school. The blinds are drawn, the signal is given, and each little head is bowed as a happy stillness, free from any morbid taint, descends upon the children. It is real silence, not lazy half-dozing. No attempt is made to suggest a theme for meditation, and yet something akin to true meditation takes place; for when the teacher's voice calls the children by name, one by one, into the light of the adjoining room, they come as those who have learnt a wonderful and happy secret. There is a hint of depth in the merry eyes, a suggestion of more than physical health and peace in their whole bearing. A strange beauty, an elusive freshness as of morning dew, seems to have been superadded to the natural childish vitality and charm that are so delightful in themselves. Whatever one may think of the Montessori system, few would question the wisdom of that spell of quietude in the middle of the morning's play.

This insistence upon man's need for silence, quite apart from any definitely religious motive or object, seems elementary and pedestrian, but it needs reiterative emphasis

in this age of loud disputes and weak convictions. The other day I chanced to talk to a strong, plain working-woman whose mastery over adverse circumstances was little short of heroic. She had much to say concerning the simple habit of silence. "When I was a little girl," she remarked, "my mother taught me that arnica was good for bruised flesh, and silence was good for a bruised soul; and she made me apply both whenever they were needed." Such homely wisdom, found more often in cottages than in mansions, has far more to do with the secret of man's communion with God than we imagine. The soul that knows how to be silent in the ordinary vicissitudes of life is the soul that will most readily master the art of spiritual quiet and recollection.

So, after all, the queer fake-culture of silence, with its jargon about concentration and "coming into tune with the Infinite," and its cheap paraphernalia of crystals and magic mirrors and breathing exercises, is based upon the recognition of a real need, to which many of those who sneer at it are pathetically blind. The Church especially has still to learn what many a poor "crank" has learnt long ago—that we frail, distracted children of men have no chance of hearing the voice of God until we have learnt to be silent and listen. The spiritual realities do not shriek and shout, and it still remains true that Jesus comes "the doors being shut." It was high wisdom, if but poor exegesis, that made the mystical instinct interpret those shut doors as the resolute quieting of the soul which is necessary before the Christ can enter. When the saints and mystics desired the Vision of visions, they first shut the soul's doors, "for fear of the Jews." It is not Christian liberty, but sheer dullness of spirit, that frees us from

a wholesome fear of that "mixed multitude" of thoughts, concerns and motives that turns the soul's sanctuary into a market-place where the voice of Jesus is drowned in the clamour of jangling impulses. Before we have any real right even to discuss the difficulties of communion with God we must have resolved, at the cost of whatever hardship to our relaxed and dissipated souls, to learn the secret of silence.

III

More especially we must learn to cultivate a deep reticence regarding the affairs of the soul. On this subject F. W. Faber's words are worth pondering:

In spirituality, talking is always a loss of power. It is like steam. It is mighty when it is imprisoned, a mere vapour when it is set free. The "secret of the King" is dishonored when publicity is given to it, and it is no longer an element of earnestness, a source of fortitude within the soul. Hence it is that so few people have a sufficiently strong spiritual constitution to be able to indulge unharmed in conversation about their interior life and their mystical experience. . . .

So also is it in good works. Many fine plans have been spoilt prematurely by making them public; not only because it was indiscreet, and has raised obstacles which would otherwise have been taken quietly and disarmed unawares, but also because we get tired of a thing which we talk much about. Our firmness goes off in talk. Our courage, too, is disheartened because of the chilling and adverse criticism to which we have exposed ourselves. Our power to persevere went with our divulging the secret.

In like manner, charity is unqueened by all this publicity. Everything that is lovely and heavenly about it is marred and disfigured, the bloom gone from it, the odour passed off, because its sanctuary has been invaded. . . . The tongue is a fountain that requires a huge water-power to feed it, and this power publicity seems abundantly to furnish; so that with that class of sins, a desperate, hungry, multitudinous, insatiate brood, the facilities are almost converted into necessities. But we not only want to give

ourselves publicity, but to know the publicity of others. Hence our minds are filled with such a host of little details, scandals, gossips, rumors, hints, surmises, interpretations, and judgments, that we are hardly able to practice the Presence of God at all; and as to our prayers, distractions invade them with such irresistible regularity, that we can foresee and calculate the time when it will be no prayer at all, but all distraction.*

Who that has searched the deeps of his heart can doubt the truth of this? Our prayers are thin and perfunctory in exact proportion as our tongues are glib and gratuitously communicative. By the time we have talked a subject threadbare, we have evaporated its essence, and when at last we think of setting it before God, we are overtaken by a humiliating sense of emptiness and futility. The thing that had swelled to such gratifying dimensions under the genial influence of discussion, is, in the light of the Eternal, seen to be a mere mote of small dust. As a matter of fact, we feel disinclined to pray about it at all, at least in private; and this is a healthy sign, for it means that there is at least one corner of our life in which we cannot tolerate a sham. It probably began as a reality, but we have talked it into a sham. It is no longer part of us. It is something quite external to our true selves—an occupation, not a vocation.

And if we trace this dismal business to its root, we shall find that what our habit of talking has done for us is really to undermine the very foundations of our spiritual life. If prayer has any reality at all, it is founded upon a sense of God, and as it develops into something more than an occasional spasmodic cry under the pressure of need or anguish, our sense of God becomes a dominant factor in

*The Blessed Sacrament, pp. 250-51.

our lives. We are learning the habit of referring everything to Him, and measuring everything by His standard. But what does the love of talking do for this growing sense of God? Let Faber speak once more:

What comes of this, but want of greatness? It is all so mean, so very mean. For the love of publicity, interpreted spiritually, comes to this. The soul is so wearied of elevating itself to God, so tired of breathing the thin pure air of His presence, that it turns faint and leans upon the world, and makes the world its judge, its remunerator, its god; and the world lives on speed, feeds like a swallow as it flies, and cares for no harvest but swift results and the grandeurs of a night; everything becomes shallow about us, tall without girth, inconsistent, and insecure; everything must be run up, there is no time to grow. Novelties are wanted, and successes, and wonders, and sudden starts, and bold moves. All these things are the contradictories of the spiritual life.*

We are slow to realize that the so-called religious world is still—the world. Those who are inside that “religious” world are duped by it, and those who are outside are tragically prejudiced against religion itself by identifying it with that conventional religiosity whose hollowness they are quick to discern. The Christian who lives in slavish deference to the religious world is, in effect, a living negation of the very soul of Christianity. It all runs back to this in the end: whether we mean to live in the light of God, or in the light of the world; and if we choose the latter, prayer becomes not only difficult, but, in its full sense, impossible.

What old spiritual writers used to call “human respect”—that enslavement to the opinion of our fellows which is responsible for nine-tenths of the futility of our lives—

*Op. Cit., P. 252.

lies at the root, not only of our inability, but also of our more or less pronounced disinclination for solitary communion with God. Under its domination the world is always with us. We may enter into our closet and shut the door, that we may pray to our Father who seeth in secret; but scarcely have we turned the key in the lock, when the omnipresent company invades our solitude, blotting out the Divine Presence and filling the silence with a myriad distracting tongues. We are beset by an inquisitorial world-specter. It is as though the gaze of all mankind had been focused in one piercing, inescapable eye, and concentrated upon our soul. To live beneath that intimidating glare is a slavery so galling that, as one has well said, the austerities of a Carthusian monastery might be easier to bear. It turns religion into an irksome imposition, if not into a positive torment, and makes of life a tawdry stage-play—a hollow, heartless, spectacular affair, in which convention takes the place of right, prudential wisdom supplants character, and public opinion usurps the Judgment-seat of God.

This “human respect,” which is innate in every soul but gets its chance through the habit of ceaseless talk, and grows with the growth of our loquacity concerning things that are meant to be wrapped in silence, is at once the most puerile and the most noxious of our many present-day superstitions. “What have I gained,” asked Emerson of his generation, “that I no longer immolate a bull to Jove, or a mouse to Hecate; that I no longer tremble before Eumenides, or the Catholic Purgatory, or the Calvinistic Judgment-day—if I quake at opinion, the public opinion, as we call it; or at the threat of assault, or contumely, or bad neighbors, or poverty, or mutilation, or at

the rumor of revolution, or of murder? If I quake, what matters it what I quake at?"

In the end this love of talk, which at the worst we regard as an amiable weakness, breeds that cowardly and servile temper which is the antipodes of dynamic prayer. For if prayer be indeed a great adventure, a giving of all for all, a staking of a man's whole life upon an unseen good whose only pledge is the Cross, then only the brave can pray. The essential servility of the talkative is, as a rule, concealed from us, because such persons have a very ambitious conception of what is due to them, and insist somewhat violently upon their rights. But, in reality, the soul that empties itself of its most intimate treasure in talk delivers itself over into a state of helplessness and slavery. Its clamorous self-assertiveness is the measure of its servile dependence upon the esteem and approval of its circle. Such a soul will never attain to vital communion with God. It may, indeed, have a remarkable facility in prayer—souls of this type are often temperamentally inclined to expansive devotions—but it will always stop short of the kind of prayer that transmutes life into power and victory.

That was a strange dictum of Abbot Alois, one of the Fathers of the Desert, in which he maintained that "unless a man say in his heart, I and God are alone in the world, he will not find peace"; and we need do no violence to our corporate consciousness and subscribe to a barren individualism, in order to appreciate this saying. It expresses a profound truth of religious experience. Its logic is the logic of the heart. Everyone who knows anything about the interior life knows that there is indeed a moment in our communion with God in which the soul knows itself

to be alone with Him in the world, and knows also that in that august aloneness lies peace and power. It was in His hours of solitary communion with the Father, when all other presences receded before the one overshadowing, all-inclusive Presence, that Jesus heard the cry of the world's life and looked deep into its heart. It was then that He divined the uttermost of human need and sorrow. "Close to the heart of the Eternal Father, He learnt to love men, to see their misery, to understand God's purpose for them, to perceive the true meaning of sin. He leaves the world, and His reward is to know human life as none other ever knew it, to suffer, to pray, and to die for it."

"It is no small matter," says Thomas à Kempis, "to keep silence in an evil time." Sorrow may be among God's mightiest angels, but it does not necessarily, and in itself, do angels' work. A time of sorrow is often a time of moral and spiritual relaxation, of weakening self-pity, and of incontinent demands upon the sympathy of others. The atmosphere of the house of affliction or mourning tends to become valetudinarian. It breeds self-importance rather than heroism. And the selfishness of sorrow feeds upon speech. Small wonder that the masters of the spiritual life have always held up as the ideal what old writers used to call "the virginity of suffering"—the habit of keeping silence concerning our sorrows to all except God! There is, of course, a limit to this counsel. Human sympathy of the right kind is sacramental, and God comforts His servants, as He comforted St. Paul, "by the coming of Titus." But while past ages tended to deny the Divine nature of human sympathy and fellowship, our own tends to idolize them. We again and again weaken ourselves, and others, and miss the Divine consolation,

by running to this person and to that before we make our need known unto God. In the joy of our discovery of the sacredness of human affection, we forget that it remains unshakably true that whatever be the power of human sympathy, the soul of man is created for direct, immediate communion with its God. Nothing, however lovely and true in its own order, can take the place of that immediate touch. And that touch will not be experienced by a soul that has exposed itself to every well-meaning hand, in its feverish search for comfort.

Did we but know the things that belong to our peace in times of sorrow and adversity, our instinct of spiritual self-preservation would urge us to hug silence to our bosoms and to reserve our deepest confidences for God. And of all sorrows, those of the inward life most urgently call for silence. The vice of airing one's soul to any and every man whom we believe likely to prove sympathetic and helpful is eating the very core of reality out of those who practice it. There are times in our spiritual life when we need a human counsellor and guide, but nowhere are wisdom and self-restraint more imperative than here. Our Protestant practice allows us to give free rein to our craving for sympathy, to pour out our confidences with as much profusion and intimacy of detail as we feel inclined to, and to go back upon the matter of our self-revelation as often as we choose, re-opening the same question again and again and keeping evil memories green. It is at this point that the Confessional makes its most valid claim, for one of its rubrics requires that the penitent pledge himself to refrain from ever discussing again what has once been confessed, either with his confessor or with anyone else. This is wise counsel, as anyone who has been con-

cerned in the cure of souls well knows. And unless all who seek spiritual counsel, whether from a minister or from any trusty friend, are willing to abide by this rule, it were far better if they determined to hide their spiritual wounds from every eye but God's.

IV

The most formidable enemy of the spiritual life, and the last to be conquered, is self-deception; and if there is a better cure for self-deception than silence, it has yet to be discovered. How many of the feverish emotions, rooted half in the flesh and half in the nervous system, which we mistake for Divine callings and inspirations would survive the test of silence? We have often been duped by some stirring of surface-feeling, or temperamental passion which clothed itself in spiritual garb, when we might have known the truth had we but taken our exaltation between our hands, as it were, and put it to the ordeal of silence. Nor is the result of this test merely negative. In nine cases out of ten, the unmasking of spurious vocations and impulses is all that is needed to let the voice of the true Shepherd be heard. That voice is always low and quiet. It often comes in and beneath the calls of ordinary duty. Yet it cannot be mistaken. Only a whisper, but the work is done; a foundation has been laid upon which a new life can be built. Doubt as to the reality of our spiritual experience is our haunting besetment to-day, when popular psychology has invented a new species of mental torture by its talk of autosuggestion and subjectivity and its mechanism of psycho-analysis. From that torture the sensitive among us will never escape, unless we resolve to be still and know.

And here it must be borne in mind that the silence we mean is not self-exploration and self-dissection, or that it

corresponds to the process of psycho-analysis at the hands of an expert. Spiritual silence is the turning of the soul in quietness to a Power beyond itself. Self-analysis always breeds either a purely natural excitement—a mere effervescence of high spirits tinged by religious feeling—or else the dullness of self-despair. We are accustomed to defend a purely natural religiosity by way of reaction against the old-time orthodoxy which made human nature synonymous with evil. But while human nature is not evil, it is certainly, taken at its highest valuation, the good which is often the worst enemy of the best. Nothing can more effectually frustrate the transmutation of human nature into that which God intends it to be than that same human nature content with its own goodness. For generations we have made war upon a theology which denied the inherent goodness of human nature and made a virtue of self-disparagement. What is the result? Scarcely had we proved, with great satisfaction to ourselves, that the gloomy self-abasement and the grovelling penitence of certain old-time saints were due to disordered livers, when laboratory psychology came along and bullied us into believing that spiritual elation was merely natural effervescence plus black coffee, or some less respectable stimulant. So we have come to question the reality of our spiritual exaltation, as we once questioned the reality of other people's spiritual depression. And it is only by the constant, patient effort to attain that stillness in which the voice of God can be heard that we shall ever find rest to our souls. If religion is of any value at all, it must be demonstrable beyond the reach of doubt—as demonstrable as that water wets or fire burns. And it is in the silence that our faith will be spiritually verified.

But how shall we recognize this voice of God, seeing that so many deluding voices call to us in the stillness? To begin with, we must be prepared to find ourselves making mistakes, and not to be discouraged by such mistakes. All life is a pursuit of truth against hazards, and the falsest life of all is that which is forever seeking to guard itself against the risk of imposture. We are sent into the world by the God of brave men that we may, through many mistakes probably, learn to distinguish the voice of the true Shepherd from the voice of "strangers."

The alert and courageous soul making its first venture upon the spiritual life is like a wireless operator on his trial trip in the Pacific. At the mercy of a myriad electrical whispers, the novice at the receiver does not know what to think. How fascinating they are, these ghostly pipings and mutterings, delicate scratchings and thin murmurs—and how confusing! Now he catches the plaintive mutterings of a P. & O. liner trying to reach a French steamer, now the silvery tinkle from a Japanese gunboat seeking its shore station. There are aimless but curiously insistent noises, like grains of sand tumbling across tar paper: these are the so-called "static" noises of the atmosphere adjusting itself to a state of electrical balance. Again, there come series of tuneless splashings—that is heat-lightning miles away—followed by the rumor of a thunderstorm in the opposite direction. Now he thinks he has got his message, but it is only the murmured greeting of ships that pass in the night. And then, just as his ear has begun to get adjusted to the weird babel of crossing sounds, there comes a remote and thrilling whisper that plucks at his taut nerves and makes him forget all his newly-acquired knowledge. It is the singing of the

spheres, the electrical turmoil of stars beyond the reach of the telescope, the birth-cry and death-wail of worlds. And when he is steeped soul-deep in the spell of this song of songs, there comes a squeaking, nervous spark, sharp as the squeal of a frightened rat. He decides to ignore it, and then suddenly realizes that it is calling the name of his own boat. It is the expected message, and he nearly missed it!

So the soul that waits in silence must learn to disentangle the voice of God from the net of other voices—the ghostly whisperings of the subconscious self, the lurking voices of the world, the hindering voices of misguided friendship, the clamour of personal ambition and vanity, the murmur of self-will, the song of unbridled imagination, the thrilling note of religious romance. To learn to keep one's ear true in so subtle a labyrinth of spiritual sound is indeed at once a great adventure and a liberal education. One hour of such listening may give us a deeper insight into the mysteries of human nature, and a surer instinct for Divine values, than a year's hard study or external intercourse with men. That is why the great solitaries always surprise us by their acute understanding of life. They are at home among its intricacies, have plumbed both its meanness and its grandeur, and know how to touch its hidden springs of action. And they know man because they know God and have heard His voice. To know God "preëminently" is their distinction, and it may be ours, at the cost of simple, painstaking honesty with our Maker. Prayer of positive, creative quality needs a background of silence, and until we are prepared to practice this silence, we need not hope to know the power of prayer.

The Ministry of Meditation

INTRODUCTION

A LITTLE while ago we were told that we had had enough of thinking about God; it was now high time to translate our thinking into practice, mobilize our forces, and "do something." Our young men and women had been captured by the ideal of service, and were only waiting for a Church that would give them something to do and lead them in the doing of it. It sounded plausible, and religious leaders dreamt of a large influx of candidates for the ministry and the Foreign Field, not to speak of a host of young lay workers eager to strike out on lines of their own. What actually happened, however, was the reverse of what these sanguine prophets predicted. Not only is there to-day a tragic scarcity of volunteers for distinctly spiritual work, but even the most broadly humanitarian movements appeal for workers in vain. Child welfare, for instance, has become almost a shibboleth among progressive folk; yet one of the most advanced orphan institutions in England, where the best methods of child welfare are being tested on a large scale, finds it almost impossible to fill the vacancies on its staff. Social service, again, is the catchword of the altruistically minded; yet the head of a farm colony, conducted on the most modern and genially human lines, appeals in vain for young men to act as brothers to the colonists. Why this dearth?

The answer to that question cannot be given in any summary fashion; but there can be no doubt that one of the prime causes for this dearth of volunteers for service, in an age when the idea of service is held in almost

superstitious reverence, is simply the lack of clear conceptions of the duty, the motive, and the end of true service. Professor D. S. Cairns has told us that in the Army there was scarcely one man in fifty who had any adequate knowledge of the fundamental principles and inward meaning of Christianity. There was a surprising amount of potential religion in the men, and a degree of essential goodness and pure unselfishness that was little short of amazing; but the impulse ran to waste, and the raw lump of religious feeling remained "unworked," and therefore largely unavailable, for sheer lack of elementary knowledge. In every department of life we give knowledge its due place. We do not, for instance, put a cricket bat in a boy's hand and pitchfork him into the field without anyone to teach him the rules and "show him how." Yet we have sent a great army of men into life from our Sunday schools without having given them any more definite knowledge of religious truth than is held in solution in a vague feeling about God, half instinct, half superstition.

And when we turn from the man in the street to the man in the pew, we find very much the same state of affairs. True, he knows a great deal more about Christianity than his brother outside the Church; but he knows it largely by rote, and as an abstraction out of any close relation to the life he lives and the work he has to do. He knows after a fashion, but he has never been taught to think about what he knows, and to think about it in such a concrete, practical, acutely personal way as to make it truly his own. His prayer-life is feeble and intermittent, and his response to the call for service negligible, for the simple reason that he really knows very little at first

hand about the God to whom he prays and whom he is called to serve.

Now this may seem as if we were playing with words. Experimental knowledge—the soul's firsthand experience of God—is something other than our intellectual apprehension of Him, and to call both "knowledge" is to mislead. But while there is some truth in this, it must be borne in mind that the two kinds of knowledge are far from unrelated. Experimental knowledge of God may now and again come to a thoughtless, careless soul in a flash; but it will not grow, or become vitally influential, unless it be supported and built up by the steady application of the mind to the things by which men live. This does not mean an involved and ambitious intellectual process. The humblest peasant is capable of this steady application, and the restless philosopher, at home in the intricacies of a hundred rival systems, may fail in it completely.

To come to our own case. Behind all true Christian service—service, that is, springing from a sense of Divine vocation and sustained by a supernatural motive—lies the interior life of prayer. And if that prayer-life, and therefore the service that springs from it, is feeble and ineffective, it is largely because it lacks the background of genuine, honest thinking. "To think well," says Thomas Traherne, "is to serve God in the interior court." To pray well presupposes patient and systematic meditation; for meditation is nothing else than the art of thinking well and thoroughly upon the truths upon which prayer is based.

Such thinking has little in common with the mere desire for information on religious subjects, or with ■ talent for

discussion; still less does it encourage a taste for controversy. It is the outcome of a settled resolution to come to grips with the great spiritual facts by pondering them patiently, and painstakingly steeping the mind in them, until it is as completely naturalized in their lofty atmosphere as it is in the air of the market-place. It may well humiliate us to reflect how nimbly, and with what instinctive precision, our minds move among the ordinary actualities of our life in the world, how sensitive they are to every change and how flexible in applying themselves to every new situation, and then to realize how awkward, blunt-edged and unadaptable these same minds are when we try to apply them to spiritual reality. There is no shirking the fact that it takes a strict and continuous discipline before the mind becomes tempered to the things of God, sensitive to the tides of grace, and flexible in the hands of the Spirit.

I

Like all great arts, the art of meditation is not easy, and those who expect their first fumbling attempts to yield a glow and rapture of soul are doomed to disappointment. The road is long and rough, and it is not the hearts of casual and impatient pilgrims that are made to burn as One talks with them by the way. The Christian soldier must make up his mind to endure hardness; it takes sweat of brain and soul before meditation can become a delight. In some cases, indeed, it never becomes delightful, and yet from that daily half-hour that seems so leaden and dreary, a hidden light will flow into the life.

Much has been written concerning the best methods of meditation, and beginners are distracted by the multitude of counsellors. A good method is a great help to most people, but in the end each one must discover his own

method; and so long as that method includes an act of the will and the affections, and a definite practical resolution—one that can be carried out the same day, if possible—we need not worry unduly over matters of order and detail. The guiding thought that must govern our attempts is that meditation is not reasoning, or quiet musing, or preaching a sermon to ourselves, but a spiritual act as definite and purposeful as a business engagement, a pledge of friendship, or a solemn undertaking. In it we apply spiritual facts and principles to ourselves as individuals and as citizens of the Kingdom of God. We draw out their bearing upon the particular concrete conditions of our own life and its problems. Having pondered them, we seek to appropriate their value by an outgoing of our loving desire toward God, and by exercising our will in the forming of resolutions. A good meditation always issues in a renewal of our vows from some fresh angle; we once again commit ourselves to God, and pledge ourselves to His service under the impulsion of the new thought or insight that has come to us, and in definite relation to the duty of the hour.

It follows that there is no room for ornamental fancy or eloquence in a genuine meditation. It may be profound and intellectually admirable, but even so it must remain quite simple and practical. Whether the person who meditates be a spiritual genius or a dull and poorly-endowed soul, the one important question is whether the meditation will stand the wear and tear of common life. If it appears fanciful and visionary, once we have reached the office and plunged into the day's business, it was a failure, no matter how it made our hearts to glow at the time. No meditation is really valid unless it leaves us with

something to which we can return during the day's business and find it helpful there. This does not mean, of course, that we must deliberately aim at being dull and obvious in our meditation: what we must aim at is to be natural. If the winged thought and the poetic imagery come naturally, and—what is of sole importance—if they express vital reality for us, they enhance the value of the meditation. But to seek them is to rob meditation of its true power. If we are indeed bent on facing reality, there is obviously no room for the deliberate culture of charm. The facts of the spiritual life are always beautiful, but their loveliness reveals itself only to the honest eye. They shine in their own light; to see them by the lantern of poetic fancy is to create a mirage.

Perhaps the most common difficulty about meditation is the choice of a topic. "With what shall I begin?" is the vexed question, especially for those who come to meditation somewhat late in life. There is only one safe answer. Begin just where you are; that is, with the subject which is of most interest to you at the present stage.

Do we come to meditation as lovers of Nature, who have again and again seen God in some wayside flower? Then let us begin with that flower, seeking to yield ourselves up to the wonderful Life behind it. Like Brother Lawrence, we may become new beings by touching Nature's garment. "He told me," says his biographer, "that in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the Providence and power of God which has never since been effaced from his soul. This view had set him perfectly loose from the world, and kindled in him such a

love for God that he could not tell whether it had increased in above forty years that he had lived since." One might discourse very interestingly about the psychological condition which lay behind this remarkable conversion; but psychology, however important in enabling us to understand our own spiritual adventures, and still more those of other people, helps us very little in making these adventures. What we need is not to become versed in the psychology of the saints, but to get into touch with the objective reality which made them saints. There is a life, a revelation, in Nature; and if we humbly and quietly wait upon the power of that life and listen for the voice of the revelation, we shall not be sent empty away. We still like to speak of scientific law. There is no law so scientific as the law that if with all our hearts we truly seek God along the ways that are accessible to us, we shall ever surely find Him. Communion with God is not an impressionist experience, an incalculable and fugitive emotion. It is based upon the uniformity of the Divine nature, and if we insist upon approaching the quest psychologically, the only psychology we need to concern ourselves with is the psychology of man's response to an eternal and immutable environment.

Or if, perchance, we are lovers of little children and find a whole heaven in a baby's eyes, let us begin our course of meditation by setting a little child—maybe the child we love the best—in the midst of the contending multitude of our thoughts. We are slowly learning that "education" includes the education of parents by their children and of teachers by their pupils, and that the only way to approach a little child rightly is to open one's heart to its unconscious influence, to give oneself to the child in humble, unaffected

trustfulness. And as we do this in the spirit of true devotion, we shall discern the mystery and wonder of the Child of Bethlehem. If we have ever really known and loved and studied one little child, we shall know then that Christianity is the glad tidings of a Saviour "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

II

But if it is well to begin our meditation with the sweet familiar things that have sunk most deeply into our lives, we must beware of ending there. We are all as sheep led by an unknown shepherd, and it is one of our most common fallacies to imagine that that which attracts us most naturally and spontaneously is the thing that corresponds most closely to our deepest needs, and to reject any suggestion of bending our mind to the thing that does not attract as a survival of an irrational asceticism. The new psychology, if nothing else, ought to convince us to the contrary. If the subconscious self means anything, it means that we are not necessarily aware of our deepest and most potent affinities; that what we call our vocation may only be a superficial temperamental inclination, and not the trend of our real nature. The science of the saints anticipated modern psychology in this matter. Again and again the masters of the spiritual life tell us how a call, a vocation, came to them which seemed at first sight entirely uncongenial, and often violently repugnant, to their natural inclination and endowment. But as they followed it patiently and heroically, it became clear that the call that seemed so irrational was addressed to certain intimate susceptibilities and sympathies, and to certain latent capacities and power, which lay unrecognized in the depth of their being, and would have remained unknown to

them had not their brave obedience to the Divine call brought them into conscious activity.

The same holds in the practice of meditation. Subjects which seem uncongenial are often found in the end to answer to an unknown need, and to call forth an unexpected response. There is among us to-day a universal reluctance to meditate upon the great Christian doctrines—a reluctance which, as we have hinted already, is almost wholly due to the unfortunate circumstance that religious controversy has made us familiar with the objections to these doctrines before we have had time to understand the doctrines themselves. We approach them with a preconceived distaste. We are interested in the revolt of the modern mind against them (forgetting often that there has always been a “modern” mind, and it has always revolted), and seem to find it difficult to realize that the things against which that mind revolts are, to say the least, not uninteresting either. Amid the babel of modern pronouncements on the Bible, we forget that the Book has a voice of its own—a message and a power that remain untouched by the passage of time. To listen to that voice and test that power for oneself is well worth all the labor and discipline involved, and to do so one must go to the “great texts.” It may be pleasant and soothing to meditate upon the mountain-symbolism of the Psalms, or on one of the many sweet humanities in which Scripture abounds; but such meditation will not go far towards enlarging and deepening our minds. What we need is not to muse upon the psychological significance of David’s playing on the harp when Saul was in an evil mood, but to ponder on what Jesus meant when He said, “No one knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him.”

We need to wrestle with spiritual principles, to come to grips with the "hard sayings" of the Gospels and the tremendous Pauline paradoxes. Whether our ultimate intellectual conclusions be orthodox or heterodox matters comparatively little; the one thing needful is to clear our minds of the small dust of popular controversy and approach the Book "with open face."

And this brings us to the subject of purely topical meditation. Nothing can absolve us from applying our minds to the great master-facts of the spiritual world—God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, man, sin, grace, death, judgment, the Church Holy and Catholic, the Kingdom that shall have no end. What do we really believe about these facts (what we do not believe about them would probably fill a volume, but is of little real concern, humbling though that fact may be to us), and what is the effect of our belief upon our life? To meditate upon, *e. g.*, the nature of God is not to construct a theory of the Divine Nature, but to come into vital touch with God Himself through the intelligence. In the course of such meditation, we shall ask ourselves some searching questions: "What do I really believe about God when I am alone, in my private and secluded heart? What do I believe about Him in times of trouble and crisis? What, in other words, is my working faith—the faith I instinctively apply to the problems of life? How much of the teaching to which I assent as a member of the Church, or of the sentiments I occasionally express in a study-circle or other meeting, has really entered into the fiber of my being?"

Such questions, if honestly faced, will take us out of the region of merely individual conviction and experience; for our answers to them will go to prove that while we are

fully cognisant of our own difficulties and problems and needs (at least of the more superficial manifestations of them), we really know very little about God at first hand. And at this point our meditation ought to resolve itself into a state of docile attention to the voice of God Himself, a firm resolve to know Him better, and a sincere outgoing of our heart's desire to Him. We become aware at this stage that our conscious difficulties and needs are not the deepest and most real, and we shall feel impelled to turn from our known selves to Him "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid"—the God who searches and interprets the subconscious self. We shall feel that there are in God whole worlds of grace and glory which have not entered into our personal experience, but which are none the less of supreme moment to us, both as individuals and as members of God's family; and if we are wise, we shall gird ourselves to explore these unknown tracts, for they will prove to be "our own country."

The task is not an easy one. At first we shall grope and stumble along a path lit but dimly and fitfully. Distractions—the chronic torment of those who wish to meditate—will drag us back at every step, and we shall often lose heart. But while we need to be severe with those recalcitrant minds of ours that are always going off at a tangent, we also need to remember that Christian meditation is not a New Thought drill in concentration or self-hypnotism. Distractions need not be hindrances. They may be, and often are, the raw material of a far more profitable meditation than the one they interrupt. If, *e. g.*, during a meditation upon God, the thought of some harassing care or absorbing occupation recurs again and

again, why not make that thought part of the meditation by seeking to learn how the spiritual fact we are pondering bears upon it? After all, the first requirement of a good meditation is not flawless logical sequence, but *reality*; and many a so-called distraction is nothing else than the voice of God recalling us from mere speculation to reality. But while meditation must be related to personal problems, it must never be allowed to spell either self-introspection or absorption in one's own problems. Self-regard is the slum of the soul, and the supreme function of meditation is to lift us out of its squalor into the clear, pure air of the spiritual world.

III

In meditation God grows upon us until we are saturated with the thought of Him. At first the whole spiritual world seems a vague abstraction, but gradually, as we gaze with reverent, steadfast eyes into that infinite Life from which we came and from whose exhaustless fountain the frail vessels of our lives are filled, we come to discern its beauty and splendor. What was vague and empty is seen to be a full and wonderfully articulated reality. Gradually but surely, we become "familiar with the infinite riches of the many-sided idea which is God."

Perhaps it is the mystery of Creation that first enthralls us. Of a sudden—we know not how, but we know it came by a habit of fixed attention—we see creation as a romance, the wooing of the Eternal Lover. We discern the self-giving Love in the heart of God when He made man. We see it take flesh in Jesus. How shall we name Him who is the Fountain of Love, and Him in whom the Response of Love became incarnate, and Him who is the Tide of Love sweeping from God to man and from man back to God? What if, after all, the great Catholic in-

sight into the mystery of Love which we call the doctrine of the Trinity holds that truth which alone can satisfy and build up our souls? In something after this fashion, we may, through meditation, rediscover for ourselves the truths about God which some like to call dogma, but which are in reality seeds of life. It will come to us that what theologians call the Incarnation means a revolutionary reorganization of humanity. Where before we relegated it to the region of dry doctrine, we find now that it is a principle whose implications extend over the whole of the world's life. We realize that it pledges each of us to a way of life so new and wonderful that we shrink from its mingled glory and terror, while leaping to its thrilling challenge—a way of life so broad that it embraces the whole universe, and yet so narrow that there is no room in it for even a half-starved self. We also gain glimpses into the mystery of the Spirit's working. The Dove that hovered over the waters of Christ's baptism, the Pentecostal tongues of fire, the power that created the Body of Christ which is the Church become symbols of a living reality to be progressively appropriated in experience.

The Gospel story, which has become mere history—and legendary history at that—for so many of us now reveals its timeless value. Gazing upon Jesus in humble, loving meditation, we shall see the uncreated Life clothing itself with our human nature, and taking the flickering torch of our morality into its deathless glow. The nativity and childhood, the baptism, the temptation, the three years' ministry, and the passion and death of Jesus yield up their compelling significance to our waiting souls. We no longer see them, with dull eyes, as mere stages in the development of the greatest among the sons of men, but

as freed from the "wheel of becoming," and taking their place in the world of eternal fact. Each shines for us with its own creative light, for from each there streams out a restoring and transforming energy such as can reside in no mere historical happening. Hampered no longer by the importunate irrelevancies of theoretical discussion, we adore the Child Jesus with the shepherds of Bethlehem, and so learn the secrets to which mere investigation, whether its results be orthodox or heterodox, has no key. We know why the sages worshiped "when they saw the young Child with Mary His mother." Each successive movement in the drama of our redemption appears in its own perfection, and communicates its own gifts to our souls. Each makes its own demands, and suggests its own method of approach. The contemplation of the Nativity initiates us into the path of humility. The stages of the three years' ministry impose their appropriate spiritual discipline upon us. The redeeming death reveals to us the pearl of penitence, and exercises us in the theology of the broken and contrite heart. We shall not close our eyes to critical values; but we shall give to critical enquiry its own place, which is a more important one than traditionalists dream of, and a less important one than modernists like to think.

We shall find that as we go on, our meditations, instead of growing more elaborate and complex, will grow steadily simpler, one single thought often sufficing to fill the quiet half-hour. F. W. Faber has well said that one commonplace truth which would seem tame and trivial to the beginner suffices a saint for hours of contemplation. We have often marveled how simple, how childish almost, are the recorded devotions and aspirations of many of the

mightiest spirits, and in what reverence they held certain books which we cast aside as quite too elementary and commonplace for our color-loving minds. But as we go on in the lowly way of meditation, we too shall become capable of that "loving, simple, sustained attention of the mind to divine things," which sees "a whole world in a grain of sand." That steadfast spiritual gaze and loving adherence of the soul to God which caused St. Francis to find food for lifelong meditation in the one phrase, "My God and my All," is not a negation of the intellect, an artificial return to childish ways. It is rather an intellectual achievement (where intellect means not mere reasoning, but the exercise of the larger reason which includes spiritual imagination), akin to that of the scientist who can take in a large group of facts at one simple glance, and almost instinctively synthesize them into a single unity. It belongs to the realm of that spiritual intelligence which is the very flower of thinking and reasoning. Nothing reveals the essential vulgarity of the restless impressionist mind more than the things that tire and bore it. In this sense, also, to love God with the brooding love that finds its absorbing occupation in the mere gazing upon the Beloved is a liberal education.

IV

We are thus led by the practice of meditation from the point where self occupies the center of our thought and we expect God "to revolve diligently round us," to the point where we become predominantly aware of God. We are now far more concerned about the claims of the love of God upon us than about even the most spiritual of our own moods and desires. God is becoming the central reality—the beginning, middle and end of our prayer. All men have the power of seeing God and realizing His pres-

ence spasmodically and in flashes, but the spiritual discipline of meditation raises what was an evanescent mood to a sustained habit.

If, then, we have been faithful in our meditation and not allowed it to become an occasion of self-seeking, we shall find that love to God—that steady and profound gravitation towards our Creator and Redeemer which is more than an emotion, and in which lies our very life—will be born in the heart. Who can compel love, we often ask; and how can we, whose spirits blow where they list, obey a command to love the unseen? In meditation we may find an answer. We love God so little because we know Him so imperfectly. Who loves a chance acquaintance? “We know and have believed,” says St. John, “the love of God towards us.” The unknown may, and does, exert an initial attraction; but our response depends upon our knowledge. In valid meditation that knowledge dawns and grows. Thoughts come to us which are no mere intellectual apprehensions, but lay compelling hands upon emotion and will. Through them the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, and ere we know it we respond in some measure. We must needs love, since He has first loved us. There is but one love, and it created as well as recreated us. To be made in God’s image is to be made to love Him, and to love Him means life from the dead. The humblest act, then, becomes an offering of love—radiant, beautiful, exquisite as no work of art can be exquisite. Each word becomes mystical and holy because it is the impulse of love articulate. The meditation which does not waken love in our hearts, however poor and feeble that beginning of love may be, is imperfect; for where God and the soul really meet, there the intel-

ligence, the will and the emotions rise together, and what before was heresay of conventional theology becomes self-evident truth. God reveals Himself as the supremely loving and lovable One; and love, as Thomas Traherne reminds us, is continually communicating, propagating, and begetting itself.

We see now how far astray we are when we speak of the burning love of the saints for God as a mediæval characteristic impossible to men of our day. The love of man for God is not the fashion of any age. It is grounded beyond the reach of change in the nature of God and man. Its expression varies from age to age, but its power persists unweakened; and the last lesson which the last man born on this earth must learn is that man's sole dignity and happiness lies in learning to love his Maker and to serve Him out of pure love. The difference between the saints of old and ourselves is not one of inherent nature: it is simply that they took time to ponder God, to gaze upon Him in an act of supreme attention in which intelligent will and desire concurred in perfect harmony, while we are too greatly overrun with small activities and occupations to find leisure for such pondering. No human being, whether living in the earliest ages of desert spirituality, or in the foremost files of our time, who has really set himself to live in the thought of God but has felt the glow of a new affection, the unsealing of a fountain of love within.

And as we ponder and are silent, that Love will utter its unspoken demands. In some form or other, we shall hear the cry, "My son, give Me thy heart." And on our answer to that cry hangs our destiny.

THE MINISTRY OF SILENCE

INTRODUCTION

Some one should read aloud the author's statement of the object of prayer (Page 3).

Talking Points:

If all prayer is communion or conversation, why is it necessary to provide some place for silence in all true prayer?

Do you agree with the author regarding the main cause of a sense of unreality in prayer?

Why is silence called the antechamber of prayer?

Is it your experience that all real prayer is a response to God?

If all our prayer to God is response to him, what part should silence have in prayer?

Several members of the group might tell of some definite prayer experiences that they have had when they have been conscious that God inspired their prayers, or that their prayers were *responses* to him.

The group might pledge itself to practice more silence in their individual prayer lives during the following weeks.

The remainder of the period might be spent in silence.

I

After a period of prayer the group might read silently together the quotation from Mr. George Russell.

Some one then might read aloud the three following paragraphs, concluding with the words, "Be still and know that I am God."

Here may be a fitting place for silent prayer.

Talking Points:

Why is it difficult for us of the twentieth century to be silent?

Is it true that only in fellowship we can fully realize God's purpose?

Can there be fellowship in silent group worship?

Some one might tell of some of the contributions of the "Fathers of the Desert" to man's betterment, concluding with the author's comment, "Doing their work in the world, they made time for quiet brooding, for large and heroic solitude, even though that time had to be stolen from social joys or wrested from sleep."

The group may bow in silence while some one reads quietly and slowly the following statements from the pamphlet:

1. In quietness lies our salvation.

2. In the darkness the eyes are opened, and in silence the heart speaks.

3. In order to live we must stand aloof from what the crowd calls living.
4. Silent men are kings, for they rule over a great country where none can follow them.
5. If the stillness of self-communing is a veritable well of life and healing, what of that "Silence of the soul that waits for more than man to teach"?
6. A discipline of solitude and silence is essential for those who would acquaint themselves with God and be at peace.
7. The solitary worshiper who really touches God . . . with a heart of love for all men and a tender fellow-feeling with human need and woe is engaged in a more genuine act of fellowship than a thousand gregarious individuals who mistake external togetherness for vital unity.
8. He who wishes to hear the voice of the spirit must stop his ears against the babel of tongues and put a seal upon his lips.
9. When we turn to the inner circle of the spiritual masters—the men and women, not necessarily gifted or distinguished, to whom God was "a living, bright reality" which supernaturalized their everyday life and transmuted their homeliest actions into sublime worship—we find that their roots struck deep into the soil of spiritual silence. Living in the world and rejoicing in sweet human relationships, they yet kept a little cell in their hearts whither they might run to be alone with God.

The meeting may be concluded with silent prayer.

II

As this section of the pamphlet is brief, it will be possible for it to be read aloud to the group.

The use of the hymn, "Break Thou the Bread of Life," "Spirit of God Descend Upon My Heart," or "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind," would create a spirit of worship.

Speaking honestly and sincerely, share with one another experiences of overcoming the hindrances of achieving a meaningful silence in your prayer life.

Talking Points:

Does a great deal of talkativeness in the ordinary affairs of everyday living destroy spiritual qualities of life?

Do we believe that the author speaks truly when he states that silence clarifies our duties and purposes? (Quiet thinking.)

Is there any real connection between silence regarding the ordinary vicissitudes of life and the practice of silence in prayer.

Some one from her own experience might illustrate this.

At the conclusion of a period of quiet some one should read aloud, "Before we have any real right even to discuss the difficulties of communion with God we must have resolved, at the cost of what-

ever hardship to our relaxed and dissipated souls, to learn the secret of silence."

A period of prayer might conclude the meeting.

III

A large part of this meeting might be spent in silent prayer.

Some one might briefly give the author's ideas concerning the necessity for reticence regarding the affairs of the soul. Another member of the group might briefly present the value of sharing spiritual experiences.

Talking Points:

Does the group agree with the author that "our prayers are thin and perfunctory in exact proportion as our tongues are glib and gratuitously communicative"? Is there anything conflicting about this statement and Christ's statement, "Ye are my witnesses"?

Does the "love of talking" affect a growing sense of God?

Do you agree with the author that there must be a choice of living "in the light of God, or in the light of the world"?

What is the worst enemy of dynamic prayer? (Quiet thinking.)

Where and under what conditions did Jesus see most clearly the world's need?

Share with one another what you believe to be most Christian regarding a great sorrow—should one be reticent or should he share his grief?

What did Paul mean when he said, "Bear ye one another's burdens" and "Everyman shall bear his own burden"?

Are many people in danger of talking and sharing too little?

Do you believe that God can give comfort and sympathy without the medium of man? (Quiet thinking.)

Some one may conclude the meeting with an audible prayer.

IV

Some of this meeting might be given to sharing with one another what various members of the group have learned regarding silence during the weeks that this booklet has been used.

After a period of prayer several people might tell how in their own experiences they have known silence to cure self-deception.

The group might bow in silence while some one reads the following statements from the booklet with intervals of silence between the readings.

Spiritual silence is the turning of the soul in quietness to a Power beyond itself.

It is only by the constant, patient effort to attain that stillness in which the voice of God can be heard that we shall ever find rest to our souls.

If religion is of any value at all, it must be demon-

strable beyond the reach of doubt—as demonstrable as that water wets or fire burns. And it is in silence that our faith will be spiritually verified.

The soul that waits in silence must learn to disentangle the voice of God from the net of other voices—the ghostly whisperings of the subconscious self, the luring voices of the world, the hindering voices of misguided friendship, the clamor of personal ambition and vanity, the murmur of self-will, the song of unbridled imagination, the thrilling note of religious romance.

To learn to keep one's ear true in so subtle a labyrinth of spiritual sound is indeed at once a great adventure and a liberal education.

They (the great solitaries) have a grasp of human nature. They are at home among the intricacies, have plumbed both its meanness and its grandeur, and know how to touch its hidden springs of action. They know man because they know God and have heard His voice.

Prayer of positive, creative quality needs a background of silence, and until we are prepared to practice this silence, we need not hope to know the power of prayer. The meeting might be given over to a period of prayer.

THE DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION

INTRODUCTION

The meeting might open with a period of silent prayer followed by the reading aloud of a familiar hymn which is a prayer.

The group might decide to use psalms or hymns for meditation in private worship for the next several weeks.

The following talking points will introduce the new section:

Do you agree with the author as to one of the main reasons why more people are not interested in definite Christian service?

Is the author right as to the failure of the Sunday school in giving definite religious truth?

Do you agree with the author in the reason for the churchman's lack of knowledge of religious truth? (Quiet thinking.)

The last two paragraphs of this introduction might be read aloud to the group.

A place for prayer should be given during this meeting.

I

The first part of this meeting might be spent in prayer.

The hymn, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord," would lead to an experience of self-consecration.

Talking Points:

What does the author mean when she says that the road to meditation is a long and rough one?

Do we believe that the author speaks truly when she says that the guiding thought that must govern our attempts is that meditation is a spiritual act as definite and purposeful as a business engagement, a pledge of friendship, or a solemn undertaking?

What do you think are the qualifications of a good meditation?

Do you agree with the author?

Some one might describe Brother Lawrence's experience in finding God through meditating upon a miracle of nature.

The group might share with one another ways in which they have found avenues of meditation of God.

During the quiet period the group might be given the opportunity to resolve silently to leave a place in their daily lives where meditation may become a habit. (Silence.)

II

Members of the group might bring copies of prayers that have meant much to them, and these might be used for the opening of the meeting while the group bows in silence.

Talking Points:

Do you agree with the author as to the way that is often most effective in finding the depths of our own beings, our deepest and most potent affinities?

What do you think that the author means when she says that "the one thing needful is to clear our minds of the small dust of popular controversy and approach the Book with open fact"? (Quiet thinking.)

Some one might read aloud the long paragraphs on pages 86 and 87.

Another person might present topics suitable for meditation.

Is the author correct in saying that our conscious needs and difficulties are not the deepest and most real needs that we have? (Silence.)

Do you agree with the author as to the supreme function of meditation? (Quiet thinking.)

III

This section is sufficiently brief for it to be read aloud while the group bows in silence for quiet thinking.

Opportunity may be given for several people present to relate some experiences that they would like to share with the group. It would be particularly appropriate if some would tell of particular meditation periods that had been fraught with meaning.

Has it been true in your experience that as you have continued your meditation hours, instead of growing more elaborate and complex, they have grown simpler?

A definite place should be reserved for prayer.

IV

During a period of silence the three pages of this section of the pamphlet should be read aloud.

This meeting might bring forth a number of testimonials as to what meditation periods have meant during the weeks that this leaflet has been used.

Talking Points:

Has it been your experience that the beginning, middle, and end of prayer is God? (Silence.)

Does the observance of periods of meditation lead us to become more concerned about the claims of God than we are about our own desires?

Do you agree with the author as to the reason why we love God so little? (Quiet thinking.)

While the group bows in reverent silence, some one might read the following statements from the leaflet with intervals of silence between the readings:

To be made in God's image is to be made to love Him,
and to love Him means life from the dead.

All men have the power of seeing God and realizing His presence.

We must needs love, since He has first loved us.

Where God and the soul really meet, there the intelligence, the will and the emotions rise together, and what was before heresay . . . becomes self-evident truth.

God reveals Himself as the supremely loving and lovable One; and love, . . . is continually communicating, propagating, and begetting itself.

The love of man for God . . . is grounded beyond the reach of change in the nature of God and man.

The last lesson which the last man . . . must learn is that man's sole dignity and happiness lies in learning to love his Maker and to serve Him out of pure love.

No human being . . . who has really set himself to live in the thought of God but has felt the glow of a new affection, the unsealing of a fountain of love within.

As we ponder and are silent, that Love will utter its unspoken demands . . . "My son, give Me thy heart."

On our answer to that cry hangs our destiny.

A large part of the meeting should be given to prayers of thanksgiving and consecration—both audible and silent.

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V Herman, Emily, 1874-1923.
10 The ministry of silence and meditation.
475 Adapted from "Creative prayer." Nashville,
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